

Defense News, November 19, 2007

Worried by the possible sale of satellite-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia, 188 members of the U.S. House of Representatives warned President George W. Bush they will oppose the sale unless he can “guarantee” that it “will not harm U.S. forces or our democratic ally Israel.”

In a letter released Nov. 29, the House lawmakers said they have “serious concerns over the administration’s plan to sell Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) technology to Saudi Arabia without solid assurances that such weapons cannot be used against American or allied forces.”

The letter was written by Reps. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., and Christopher Carney, D-Pa. It was signed by 186 other House members and attracted supporters as diverse as liberal Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and conservative Rep. Robin Hayes, R-N.C.

Kirk and Carney said they are concerned that if the precision strike capability of JDAMs falls into the wrong hands, it could be used against U.S. forces in the Middle East and “undercut Israel’s qualitative military edge.”

The letter reminds Bush that “Saudi Arabia remains in a formal state of war with Israel, the preeminent democracy in the Middle East.” In addition, Kirk and Carney write that Saudi groups continue to spread anti-American Wahabi extremist ideology that “we face on the battlefields of the global war on terror.”

The JDAM sale is part of a \$20 billion arms sale the Bush administration is expected to announce formally in early December.

In addition to Saudi Arabia, arms are intended for Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Once a formal notice of the sale is sent to Congress, lawmakers in both houses have 30 days to pass resolutions of disapproval. Otherwise, the sale goes forward.

Vague details of the sale were provided to Congress last summer. News of such sales is often dribbled out months before official notification so that the White House can judge congressional reaction.

The upcoming sale may include upgrades for Patriot anti-missile batteries in several of the countries and new shore patrolling ships for Saudi Arabia countries.

Last summer, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the weapons deal as a way to “bolster forces of moderation” in the Middle East as a counter to al-Qaida, Hizbollah, Syria and Iran.

This is the second letter to Bush from lawmakers wary of the sale.

In a July 31 letter, 114 House members, including 18 Republicans, told Bush that they intend to introduce a Joint Resolution of Disapproval of the sale “the minute Congress is officially notified.”

“Saudi Arabia has not been a true ally in furthering the United States’ interests in the Middle East,” said Rep. Anthony Weiner, D-N.Y., who helped write the July letter.

“The idea that we are going to reward the Saudis with precision weaponry is a stunningly bad idea,” Weiner said.